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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of community colleges (CCs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) are now working in partnership to develop education and training programs enabling low-income workers to gain the education and skills necessary to obtain higher-wage jobs and develop a foundation for lifelong learning and career advancement. The following elements constitute the basics of good program design: recruitment; orientation and preparation; education and/or training; in-program support; placement; and postplacement retention and advancement. A review of three Ohio-based CC/CBO partnerships identified the following issues for consideration when developing CC/CBO initiatives: (1) whether to focus on education attainment or achieving economic self-sufficiency; (2) how to best achieve educational success; and (3) other issues related to education and skills training (credentials, recruitment, participants' income/work, connecting with employers, retention strategies, funding and the changing fiscal landscape, and college credit). Those interested in forming CC/CBO partnerships should consider the following suggestions: (1) don't force a partnership; (2) acknowledge the challenges of partnership initiatives; (3) commit to up-front planning; (4) implement the mission and strategy as planned; (5) allocate adequate staff; (6) monitor and track progress from the start; (7) let unsuccessful partnerships die; and (8) remember to use partnership initiatives to tackle more systemic issues. (18 endnotes) (MN)

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Career Advancement for Low-Income Workers Through Community College and Community-Based Organization Partnerships

A small, but growing number of community colleges and community-based organizations are now working in partnership to help low-income workers gain the education and skills necessary to succeed in the labor market. These CC/CBO partnerships offer the promise of helping more students successfully complete a course of study or training that can lead them to higher-skilled and higher-wage jobs. Successful partnership initiatives combine a well-conceived program model for serving students with sound management practices tailored to the challenges of operating a partnership venture. There are a number of principles that might be useful in developing and fostering more effective CC/CBO partnerships.

Introduction

There is little debate today that work is the most effective way out of poverty. There is also a growing consensus that earnings from work are linked to educational attainment. In today's economy, where work is increasingly a function of knowledge and technical competencies, skills are more important than ever before. Simply put, the opportunity for low-wage workers to achieve economic security is tied to their ability to improve their education and skills.[1]

The issue for many low-income workers is how to get the education and skills required to get ahead. One approach is to acquire skills on the job. The reality, however, is that most employers invest little in entry and low-wage workers, preferring to provide training to their more experienced and higher paid employees.

Another approach is to take advantage of the education and training programs of post-secondary institutions. Unfortunately, far too many low-wage workers do not benefit from these opportunities. There are a number of reasons for this ranging from institutions that are poorly equipped to serve low-income workers to individuals who do not have the wherewithal to engage in advanced education and training.[2]

Within the post-secondary system, community colleges have the greatest potential to effectively serve low-income workers. Even so, there are limitations given their current approach to education and training. Richard Kazis notes in a recent paper:

The community college has great potential to be the lead local

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institution for helping low-income individuals obtain credentials and skills they need to advance to further education and careers. At the same time, this uniquely American institution faces serious challenges and obstacles to achieving its potential. Without significant changes in their practices, priorities, and policies, many community colleges are unlikely to meet rising expectations regarding their effectiveness.[3]

Efforts are underway across the country to identify ways community colleges can be more responsive to the needs of low-income workers. Many of these efforts focus on specific changes of policies and practices within the community college itself or the state system that guides the efforts of individual colleges.

One promising practice reaches beyond the college setting to link community colleges (CC) and community-based organizations (CBO) in an effort to improve low-income workers access and success in post-secondary programs. These CC/CBO partnerships combine the strengths of both organizations -- knowledge and sensitivity to community needs on behalf of CBOs and education and instructional programs administered by CCs -- to create targeted education and skills training initiatives that address the specific needs of low-income workers. A recent report by Public/Private Ventures provides a general introduction to this issue by identifying the reasons why it makes sense for the two very different institutions to partner and by outlining the key elements of a sound education and training initiative.[4]

The opportunities and benefits from community colleges and community-based organizations working together are real. Serious attention should be given to supporting such initiatives among national and local policy makers as well as executives within the two institutions. It is important to recognize, however, that CC/CBO partnerships are still in their infancy across the country. Mature programs are now just three to four years old. As such, there is still much to be learned about how these initiatives develop and operate. What is hopeful, however, is that those programs that have sustained operations are starting to show promising results in several important ways.

- First, programs are showing that they can move beyond a demonstration stage and begin to reach some level of scale. Several programs, including a precision machining program in Chicago and a multi-sectored program in San Antonio, are now serving hundreds of individuals annually.

- Second, programs are proving that they can provide participants both the support and environment that result in the vast majority of participants completing the education and training initiative. Programs are reporting completion rates of 75% or more, which is far better than most targeted programs and much higher than the traditional completion rates associated with post-secondary programs.

- Third, programs are reporting placements and wages that range from $10 to $15 an hour including benefits, thus putting workers in a position to achieve economic security. Some programs even prepare participants for high paying New Economy jobs such as an IT initiative in the San Francisco Bay area.

These results suggest the promise that underlies CC/CBO partnerships. This promise, however, contrasts with the reality that in too many places community colleges and community-based organizations are more likely to compete against each other than to cooperate. Also, current national workforce policy does not encourage the two institutions to work together. The P/PV report makes clear that CC/CBO partnerships face significant challenges.

> *"Developing, operating, and sustaining a partnership requires a significant openness to change on the part of both institutions and a willingness to overcome negative attitudes and a distrust of each other. Such change requires strong leadership to guide the way, resources to pay for additional activities and support functions, and a willingness to cede operational responsibilities to other organizations."*[5]

These challenges have been successfully confronted by those partnerships that have persevered and have been the undoing of those partnerships that have disappeared. It is important to better understand the issues that underlie the successes and failures in order to better support CC/CBO partnerships in the future.

This monograph examines a number of key issues that affect the success of CC/CBO partnerships and does so by building off the P/PV report. As such, the monograph identifies a number of substantive issues that are pertinent to developing and operating an education and skills training initiative targeted to low-income workers. It also focuses on matters of how organizations create and sustain effective partnerships. Finally, the monograph concludes with thoughts on how to improve and strengthen CC/CBO partnerships. To a large extent, the material presented herein was generated by a review of three Ohio-based partnerships that have started education and training initiatives within the past eighteen months.

Education and Skills Training for Low-Income Workers

The fundamental goal of a CC/CBO initiative is to develop an education and training program that enables low-income workers to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to obtain higher-wage jobs and develop a foundation for lifelong learning and career advancement. To some extent, any initiative of this type includes core activities that revolve around: a) recruitment, b) orientation and preparation, c) education and/or training, d) in-program support, e) placement, and f) post-placement retention and advancement. Although these elements may be identified and configured in different ways, they

constitute the basics of good program design. The P/PV report provides a detailed discussion on each of these core activities.

How effectively these program activities work, of course, has a major impact on an initiative's overall success. For example, a program can operate only if it recruits an adequate supply of participants. Similarly, participants benefit only if the job placement function leads to employment that offers higher wages and higher level work opportunities.

One of the key findings from the review of the Ohio-based partnerships is that the core activities are influenced by the mission and strategy that underlie the initiative. The substance of a group's mission and strategy is largely driven by their philosophies and ideas of what should be done and how it should be achieved. Not surprisingly, community colleges and community-based organizations can have very different core beliefs, which can then lead to different ideas about how things should be done.

A lack of clarity around mission and strategy can confuse a number of key program activities. For example, different beliefs about whether a program is intended to get participants higher paying jobs or an education degree can influence the recruitment process impacting both who is targeted for participation and the message used for recruitment. The end result may be an unsuccessful recruitment process. A sound program must address these issues during program design, preferably reaching a mutual understanding between the partnering organizations.

Clarifying mission and strategy at the outset, while necessary, is not easily done, particularly as it pertains to helping low-income workers gain the knowledge and skills for career advancement. As the review of the three Ohio-based partnerships found, determining how best to serve low-income workers is a complicated subject that warrants thoughtful consideration by any group seeking to embark on an initiative of this type.

1. *Mission: Education Attainment versus Achieving Economic Self-Sufficiency*

As noted at the outset of this monograph, most research indicates that economic security is tied to one's ability to gain advanced education and skills. This, however, does not mean that all workers must obtain a college education to succeed or that an initiative has to focus in this direction to be effective. Quite the contrary, workers with specific occupational skills, some of which can be obtained through short-term intensified training, can succeed in the labor market. And, quite notably, some community colleges are equally positioned to provide participants the option of obtaining skills on a short-term basis that can to lead to high-wage jobs or pursuing a more traditional educational program that leads to a formal degree.

While this may seem rather obvious, community colleges and community-based organizations may have different ideas and philosophies on this matter. This is an issue that must be resolved at the outset of any partnership initiative. If the mission is to serve participants so they obtain an educational degree (with

the idea that this will lead to economic self-sufficiency), then a program must be designed to reflect the realities of pursuing an academic program. For a worker pursuing an associate degree, this means at least two to three years of school, and likely more. This raises a number of issues that must be considered in program design such as:

- Participants' motivation and ability to take college level courses over an extended time;
- Participants' ability to support themselves and their families while engaged in school;
- Participants' ability to combine school and work over an extended period; and
- Participants' ability to pay for tuition and other expenses on an ongoing basis

However, if the mission is to help participants achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible, then a program might be designed more as a skills building initiative. This approach also has implications for program design both in terms of how the community college configures its instructional offerings and how participants organize their life and resources. P/PV's report on CC/CBO partnerships focused exclusively on partnerships operating as skills building initiatives and as such identifies a number of factors that must be considered when pursuing a program of this type.

There is no right or wrong in selecting one mission over the other. The problem is not articulating and agreeing on a choice. Whatever choice is made, there will be implications for program activities that must be recognized and considered. One of the more obvious and important implications is the influence on who might be interested in participating in the initiative. Understandably, an initiative focused on achieving an educational degree will appeal to a different audience than a program focused on short-term skills building. This reality must be addressed and reflected in subsequent program activities such as the recruitment process. As noted earlier, this impacts not only the type of audience targeted for recruitment but the message used to interest potential participants.

B. *Strategy: How to Best Achieve Educational Success*

Although determining the mission is a critical first step in any initiative, it is equally important that careful consideration be given to selecting the strategy to implement the mission. Different from the partnerships examined through the P/PV report, the three Ohio-based partnerships were generally oriented to pursuing an educational attainment mission although it was not always clearly articulated as such among all partners. This is certainly an important mission. However, there are important questions to consider relative to the best strategy for enticing and helping low-income adults to attend and graduate from college.

The strategy generally pursued by the Ohio-based partnerships focused on helping participants build appropriate college foundation skills as well as to enroll in a degree or credit-based certificate program. These efforts were typically oriented around academic programs. Certainly there are a sufficient number of low-wages workers who might be attracted to a program of this type and prepared to make the long-term commitment required to succeed. Two CC/CBO partnership efforts in Texas (Capital

IDEA in Austin and Project Quest in San Antonio) have demonstrated that such programs can attract hundreds of participants on an annual basis and can succeed. Unfortunately, one of the key issues confronting the Ohio-based partnerships was obtaining a sufficient number of participants to effectively operate a program. Although problems with recruitment may be simply a product of insufficiently developed and executed recruitment efforts, it also may be a result of a program strategy that does not appeal to the primary set of constituents.

A strategy focused on a long-term commitment to an educational program may not appeal to most low-income workers and the low-income workers typically served by some community-based organizations. In short, this may not be the best approach for assisting most low-income individuals. Why? It is generally believed that this population is much less inclined to pursue activities that result in unspecified long-term benefits rather than in short-term, tangible benefits. It may be very difficult for many low-income individuals to see the value of a general academic program, particularly as it relates to future economic success. It also may seem so distant as too not seem possible. Recent experience in welfare reform efforts where states and localities have made post-placement resources available so participants can return to school have found that few workers avail themselves of this opportunity.[6]

An alternative strategy might be configured to provide participants access to short-term career-based skills development that can lead more quickly to new jobs, promotions, and higher earnings. Such an effort can then combine short-term benefits with a message and strategy for lifelong learning. Community colleges can advance this strategy by accelerating and aggregating short-term classes into career program modules, thus providing a pathway that can lead participants to an associate degree or higher. This strategy is still pertinent to the overall mission of helping low-income individuals attend and graduate from college, it just offers a different approach for getting there. The benefit is that this strategy can articulate the possibility of more short-term tangible benefits, perhaps serving to entice more participants.

There are some reasons to think that this strategy might have value. First, the partnership initiatives in the P/PV report operate under this approach and generally report favorable outcomes. Second, Cleveland Scholarship staff note that for their adult learners programs they tend to direct economically and educationally disadvantaged adults toward skills-based programs. They believe this is a better way of introducing participants to advanced education and training, and it sets a foundation to work with them over time to obtain higher levels of education. They further stressed that a short-term success at the outset (which may include a certificate) is essential for continued participation over time.

The point is not to advocate one strategy over another but to point out that there are different approaches to implementing an educational achievement mission. Certainly a strategy focused on skills-based programs has its challenges. For example, there is no guarantee that participants will continue their education if they effectively increase their skills and earnings. In fact, most CC/CBO partnerships have yet to fully implement a skills upgrading or career pathways strategy so that those initially assisted can move forward to achieve higher levels of learning. This is an area that warrants more attention by

CC/CBO partnerships and those supporting such efforts. Nonetheless, any initiative seeking to undertake an educational achievement mission must consider various strategies and how they can be used most effectively to realize that mission.

~~5.~~3. *Other Issues Pertaining to Education and Skills Training*

Developing and implementing an education and skills training initiative is a complex endeavor. There are numerous substantive issues as well as operational matters that must be addressed. The following briefly outlines and reviews these issues.

- *Credentials*: Employers increasingly value some type of educational or skills credential as an indication that a worker is prepared to succeed in the labor market. All initiatives, whether pursuing an educational attainment or skills building strategy, need to be developed with the goal of providing participants a credential upon successful completion of the program. In many instances, such credentials will be a community college certificate or degree. Credentials may also include industry recognized certifications that typically require passage of an exam benchmarked to predetermined occupational or professional standards.[7] Initiatives should structure their efforts to help participants achieve industry certifications when possible.

- *Recruitment*: Securing a sufficient supply of participants is one of the most troublesome issues affecting education and skills training initiatives across the country. It is an issue that concerned the Ohio-based partnerships since each initiative had difficulties obtaining participants. As suggested above, the most important issue affecting recruitment is a clear articulation of an initiative's mission and strategy.

  It is also important to develop a detailed recruitment plan that outlines the specific methods and activities used to reach the target audience. For example, it is important to give considerable thought to what methods will be used for outreach ((e.g., mailings, flyer distributions, advertising, etc.) and how they will be delivered. It is also important to implement the recruitment process with a formalized system to track applicant flow. This means monitoring the response one gets from various solicitation efforts as well as continuously analyzing how the application and enrollment process is operating. It is not unusual to lose potential participants at various stages in the process as they move toward entering a program. Some fall off should be expected. Being able to identify excessive attrition and then adjust methods of operation is key to maintaining an effective process. Recruitment is a fundamental and significant element of overall project management.

- *Participant's Income/Work*: Most programs serving adults confront the issue of whether participants have sufficient income to support themselves and possibly their families while engaged in an educational and training initiative. Unfortunately, few programs have access to stipends that can address this situation. Some programs address this issue by targeting

participants that have some expectations of income (e.g., TANF recipients or dislocated workers receiving unemployment compensation). Other programs develop paid internships so participants can earn while their learning. There are no easy answers to this issue. It is important that the issue of income be considered in the program design phase and that some provisions be made to help participants deal with it even if it is just helping them find employment or re-employment when needed. This may be critical to keeping participants enrolled in a program.

Some programs feel compelled to only serve participants who work. It should be recognized, however, that this policy limits the potential pool of recruits. It does so by eliminating many of those receiving some type of public assistance. It also confronts the reality that many low-wage workers who have recently become employed are not inclined to add another activity to a full day of work.

- *Connecting with Employers*: There are several reasons for CC/CBO partnerships to connect with employers. The P/PV report addresses issues such as using employers to develop industry appropriate skills training curricula and to generate internships as well as employment opportunities for participants. One area that deserves more attention is the opportunity to work with employers to provide career advancement education and training to entry-level and low-income workers. All of the Ohio-based initiatives reported strong connections with local employers, however, all had yet to focus on employers as a potential source of participants in their programs. Such an effort, particularly targeted to larger firms, has the benefit of focusing on workers who have an income and potentially have the opportunity to apply any newly acquired skills to their work site. Such an effort can also address the issue of time, that is, how do workers add education and training to an already full day of work. Some employers have been found who provide workers paid time off to acquire skills that were needed to assume higher level jobs within their company. This is an area that CC/CBO partnerships would be wise to explore.

- *Strategy for Retention*: Just as for recruitment, a well-managed initiative should have a detailed plan for providing retention services for participants to help them complete their planned program of education and training. Such a plan should specifically outline responsibilities among partners: a structured process for supporting students as well as a system for tracking contacts and student circumstances. Attention should also be given to issues around career development. Participants need to be fully informed of their options and opportunities for advancement both in terms of work and education. Given the breadth of retention issues, a retention strategy must fully articulate how the partner organizations are going to work together to insure that participants receive their full array of retention services.

- *Funding and the Changing Fiscal Landscape*: Up until recently, public resources such as surplus TANF funds were available to support education and skills training advancement

initiatives. In some instances, these resources supported CC/CBO partnership initiatives and covered a number of the program costs, including tuition. Unfortunately the fiscal landscape has changed, at least for the time being, reducing one major source of funds. Other public resources are available to support CC/CBO initiatives. As discussed in the P/PV report, initiatives can get very creative in securing a variety of funds to support their efforts, including community development block grants, federal trade adjustment resources, and state economic development funds. Training dollars from the Workforce Investment Act system is another potential financial resource that deserves more attention.

One aspect of funding that needs careful consideration is Pell grants. In states where tuition costs can be significant for low-income workers, Pell grants are seen as a very valuable resource. Two issues must be considered. First, since Pell grants are best suited for students pursuing degree programs and doing so at least a half-time basis, it is important to make sure that the selection of a course of study or training is not overly influenced by the funding source as opposed to what is best for the student. Some participants and programs may be better off focusing on short-term skills training programs, which may not work for Pell grants. This requires finding other sources of funding for tuition and related training expenses.

Second, students enrolled in a community college may need significant remediation in basic skills before pursuing their preferred course work. Students in these circumstances face a real danger of not only using their Pell resources on these programs, but also becoming frustrated with school, dropping out and thus turning their grant into a loan. This is particularly a problem for students with serious deficiencies in reading, writing and mathematics. Minority students are a particularly vulnerable group.[8] The Pell grant should be a resource that facilitates the financing of a participant and not a determinant for what a student does.

- *College Credit*: Every CC/CBO partnership wants its program to eventually help participants commit to lifelong learning and career advancement. A key factor that can help motivate participants in this direction is the provision of college credit for the successful completion of a course. Too many colleges relegate their targeted education and skills training efforts to a continuing education program that does not provide college credit for successfully completed courses. Such action misses a real opportunity to help students gain self confidence in their work and develop a real belief that they can succeed in a college environment.

Credit courses also provide the opportunity for the college to generate resources as general operating funds are provided to colleges based on the number of students enrolled and completing credit-based classes. In a state such as Ohio, a community college receives approximately $2,700 for every 30 annualized credit hours or full-time enrollment (i.e., FTE); no specific FTE is awarded for non-credit courses.[9] Of course, students enrolled in academic programs receive credit and generate resources for their college. While this is important, it should not be the factor that influences a student's placement. Instead, non-academic programs and skill training efforts might be best upgraded so that credit is also provided for these

offerings.

Overall, there is no absolute model that CC/CBO partnerships can follow in developing their educational and skills training initiative. There are, however, numerous complex issues that must be carefully considered before embarking on a program effort. Time and attention should be devoted to each of the above issues and done so through a planning process that leads to mutual understanding and agreement on what is intended and what is to be done.

Operating a Partnership

Developing a well-conceived program model is the first step in implementing a successful initiative. It is equally important to operate and manage the initiative in an effective and efficient manner. This becomes more complicated when an initiative is conducted through a partnership or collaborative arrangement that involves two very different institutions: community colleges and community-based organizations.

Partnerships, collaborations, strategic alliances or whatever other term is used have become much more prominent in the organizational landscape as both private and public entities search for better ways to achieve their strategic objectives. As James Austin notes in his book, *The Collaboration Challenge*, "the 21st century will be the age of alliances where more organizations find new ways to work together to achieve their goals."[10] Explicit in this statement is the recognition that organizations that choose to partner or collaborate do so, not just to share information or coordinate activities, but to achieve identifiable outcomes that are desired by both groups. This is done with the belief that the efforts and strengths of multiple organizations will bring better results than the effort of any single entity.

A concise definition of collaboration or partnership is provided in the *Collaboration Handbook* a publication of the Wilder Foundation that is intended to help organizations and their leaders learn about creating, sustaining and enjoying new ways of working together. The authors, Michael Winer and Karen Ray, offer the following:

> *"Collaboration (or partnerships) is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone."*[11]

The authors go on to note that partnerships are the "most intense way of working together while still retaining the separate identities of the organizations involved." Organizations in a partnership must bring their special strengths and functions into a relationship while at the same time recognizing and acknowledging that the other partner organizations also have special features and services that are critical to the collective effort. Given the time and intensity involved in managing a partnership, "the investment in collaboration must be worth the effort. This is because collaboration changes the way we work." The authors also note that such change involves moving from a model based on competing to

building consensuses and from working alone to including others from a diversity of cultures, fields and sectors.[12]

Partnerships should be voluntary and a result of a mutual decision to work together. As such, partner organizations are expected to share "decision-making, investment, risks and rewards."[13] Although each partnership initiative is necessarily unique, a partnership should have at least the following elements present as they come together:

- A belief that both entities will benefit from the relationship
- A transfer of human resources, financial resources or both
- A written agreement that establishes a set of objectives and responsibilities and outlines the operating procedures, such as how the entities will communicate with each other
- Some evidence that the two organizations intend to collaborate in a manner that reflects the principles of partnership: balance, equity, sharing and transparency[14]

As clearly indicated in the literature, developing and operating a partnership requires an attitude committed to collaborating and a knowledge of the fundamental elements and tools that can be used to facilitate and support operations. To a large extent, the practice of partnering is more formalized and structured than generally recognized. Partnerships are not something to be developed and operated by the seat-of-the pants, but something that requires thought and structure to be effective.

Most CC/CBO partnership initiatives have little experience developing and operating an involved collaborative venture. Instead, experience generally revolves around efforts to coordinate activities among entities or more structured contract or subcontract arrangements where services or goods are being procured for a specific purpose. As such, the initiatives examined through the P/PV study and in Ohio (with one notable exception) generally did not pursue the development and operation of their partnership initiative through a formalized or structured process. In many instances this resulted in groups struggling to put pieces into place while the program was already seeking to serve participants.

A partnership requires a degree of structure and formality so that each group has a firm understanding of what is to be done and what is expected. Structure and formality provide a framework for considering whether things are progressing as needed and also provides a context for making necessary adjustments. There are several key elements relative to the development of a partnership that warrant attention.

1. *Developing and Articulating the Program Model*

Earlier in this monograph, considerable emphasis was given to the importance of clearly defining an initiative's mission and strategy. Each partner has significant knowledge and perspectives to contribute and each needs to learn and understand about the philosophies and ideas of the other partner. The program model is the best vehicle for reconciling and capturing these ideas. Each partner should

participate in its development. The program model cannot be too detailed. This is the opportunity to cover the broad array of matters that pertain to the partnership's initiative.

The program model should be explained through a document that at a minimum covers:

- the mission and strategy for the initiative
- core beliefs and assumptions about the initiative
- a targeted audience to be served
- detailed activities for implementing specific program functions such as:
  - recruitment
  - pre-education/training prep
  - education/training
  - retention
  - placement
  - post-placement support and advancement
- expectations and desired outcomes
- other potential allies, funders and partners
- a realistic budget
- staffing needs and assignments
- evaluation plan and feedback mechanisms

Each partner needs to approve the program model document before any specific actions are taken. They also need to fully embrace the philosophies and ideas that underlie the basic program model. In addition, such a document would ideally be required by any funder before providing financial support for an initiative.

3.2. *Operating and Managing the Partnership*

Operating and sustaining a partnership is not easy. David LaPiana, in his piece entitled "*Real Collaboration: A Guide to Grantmakers*," notes that

> *"Real collaboration is painful and difficult to achieve. Most often, there will not be many happy collaborators in the early going. Conflict and stress, because they can be byproducts of engagement, are often healthy signs in a collaborative; they are much preferable to distance and lack of engagement."*[15]

Just as a partnership initiative needs a well-defined program model, it also needs a formalized process for how to operate the initiative on a collaborative basis. Such a plan should be crafted at the outset and address a number of issues up-front about how the initiative is to be implemented and operated. There are many ways to craft such a plan. The seven items below are illustrative of the type of matters that should be detailed up-front as clearly as possible.

- A governance structure: who is involved, who is informed and how are decisions made
- A conflict resolution process: procedures for identifying and agreeing on problems and the methods for resolving them
- A program activities' framework: determining work roles and responsibilities
- A participant's flow chart: identifying how participants are served and assisted in the initiative
- A milestone and time schedule: identifying key achievements and due dates
- A monitoring and communications strategy: reviewing and reporting on program progress
- An accountability system: measuring performance and outcomes

Determining the details of each of these matters will depend on the partnership arrangement. Some partnerships, particularly in the private sector, create an entirely new organizational entity to carry out the goals and activities of a partnership. The educational and skill training initiatives reviewed in Ohio and in the P/PV report did not take this step; each organization conducted their partnership activities as a component of their ongoing operations. These partnership initiatives, however, did often require new management and operational processes, which included such things as new ways of assessing and selecting potential participants and new methods for tracking participant activities.

The development of new management processes and tools should involve both the leadership and staff of the partnering organizations. The staff is important since they ~~are they ones that~~ will be working ~~on a~~ daily ~~basis~~ to implement program activities. The leadership ~~has to~~must be involved, ~~as they have~~having ultimate responsibility for achieving the expected outcomes.

As with the program model, the agreed upon management processes and tools need to be captured on paper. Some call such a document a memorandum of understanding (MOU) while others refer to it as an operational plan. No matter, both groups have to sign-off on the contents of the program and agree to conduct activities according to prescribed procedures. Agreeing to what is put on paper, however, does not necessarily result in the desired procedures actually being implemented and followed. Steps must be taken to monitor what is happening.

~~5.~~3. *Other Issues Impacting on Partnership Operations*

In any new partnership arrangement, it takes time to learn about partners and develop effective working relations. This is particularly true with education and skills training initiatives as the partners have to develop an effective understanding of both the program model and the specifics of working together in a collaborative. This breaks new ground for most initiatives.

An example concerning program retention can highlight the challenge. The program model for most educational and skills training initiatives will include a component providing support services to

participants while they are in school. A community college and a community-based organization may well have different understandings of the degree of support to be provided for a participant. Each institution has their own philosophy of what support is needed and how much is appropriate. The program model can address this issue and hopefully develop some common understanding between partners and a mutually agreed plan of action. This, however, will likely not be enough. Program staff must know how support services are actually provided and utilized by participants. This requires monitoring and communication processes among those involved in this activity. Program staff will also have to make decisions on individual students, particularly those who seem at risk of not completing a program. Decisions on whether more services are needed or termination is appropriate may have to be made. Who makes those decisions, the instructor or the case manager, each of whom likely works for a different partner organization? Guidance on these types of management issues must be reflected in the partnership's operational or management plan.

As partnership initiatives develop and move forward, there are several important issues that deserve specific attention in order to achieve effective project management. These include:

- *Inter-Organizational Communication*: It is important that a partnership initiative establish routine procedures for sharing information. Such efforts should include: a) each organization's executive leadership, b) program managers, and c) line staff. Obviously, the level of engagement varies according to the degree of involvement in the initiative. It is not unreasonable for line staff to meet weekly to review program efforts which can include activities such as participant recruitment and student performance in the classroom. This is a chance for each organization's staff to communicate directly and work together to address issues as they arise. Program managers need to stay informed and know how all staff are doing in their basic responsibilities. Monthly or biweekly meetings may be appropriate. Involving the executive leadership on a periodic basis (e.g., twice yearly) is important so they can understand whether the overall initiative is progressing as expected. Their involvement can also help elevate the importance of the initiative and perhaps provide the motivation to move things along in a more efficient and effective manner.

- *Decision Making*: While partnership organizations are inclined to consult with one another on major issues such as funding and key programmatic functions, joint decision making on specific matters can be equally important. This can include issues such as selecting individuals for program participation and determining the status of poorly performing students. Winer and Ray note in their handbook that there are five styles of decision making: autonomous, consultative, consensus, democratic and delegated. They further note that each style has its benefits and limitations within a collaborative. The key thing for any collaborative, however, is to establish a decision making protocol that "details the types of decisions, who makes these decisions, and what level of decision each person or group can make in a given situation."[16]

- *Transparent Reporting*: Information is essential for good project management. Because

partnership initiatives take place typically outside the mainstream of standard organizational activities, steps must be taken to develop monitoring and reporting procedures that produce timely and important information. This information must be available to all partner organizations and include all activities even if only performed by one partner. This should include such things as documenting applicant flow through the recruitment and selection process as well as completion and outcome data on participants. Unfortunately, much of this can get fairly complicated since community colleges and community-based organizations may have different ideas on what needs to be reported on and how it should be done. The complexity can even extend to agreeing on definitions such as what constitutes an enrollment in a program (e.g., acceptance into a program, attendance at first day of class, or attendance through the first week of class). Reporting should also include things such as minutes from meetings.

As noted earlier, operating a partnership is an intense and time-consuming affair. It should be done only when all agree that the benefits of working together will exceed the costs of doing so. In some instances, a partnership initiative benefits from the involvement of a third party that cares about goals and outcomes, but does not have a financial or activity stake in the venture. This neutral entity can provide a brokering or facilitating role that helps keep the partners focused in a positive and constructive direction. This entity can also focus its attention on insuring that the basic elements of a partnership – a sound program model and operation plan – are in place and are being effectively utilized by all involved.

Supporting Partnership Initiatives

There is much to be learned about how to effectively develop and operate an initiative dedicated to helping low-income workers gain the education and skills needed to succeed in the labor market. There is even more to learn about how to operate such initiatives through a partnership that involves institutions as diverse as community colleges and community-based organizations. Admittedly, there are many challenges with each effort and the chances of success are not as high as might be hoped. Nonetheless, the need, the logic of working together, and the evidence from a small number of successful endeavors can provide sufficient motivation for supporting these types of initiatives.

It is important to acknowledge that the actions taken during both the conceptual development and operations of an initiative can influence its success. All parties interested in engaging in or supporting a partnership initiative should be mindful of what they do, or for that matter, don't do. As such, interested groups may want to consider eight suggestions or principles to guide their actions.

1. Don't Force a Partnership:

As David La Piana notes, "Real collaborations are voluntary. Partner organizations should come together because they perceive potential synergies and benefits for their constituencies."[17] Partnerships that form due to extraneous reasons -- a unique funding opportunity for example – run the risk of never fully committing to a joint undertakings. They also confront the possibility of failing to recognize that the

efforts and strengths of multiple organizations will bring better results than the effort of any single entity. Forced marriages rarely succeed.

2. Acknowledge the Challenges of Partnership Initiatives

Partnering organizations are understandably reluctant to acknowledge that they may face challenges in implementing a joint initiative. All parties would be better served by agreeing up-front that developing and operating a partnership initiative that focuses on advancement opportunities for low-income workers will not be easy from both a substantive and a management perspective. The chance for success can be greatly enhanced if technical assistance resources are available at the outset of an initiative to help develop the program model and partnership structure. In fact, partner organizations might well benefit from using non-affiliated outside expertise to provide such assistance.

3. Commit to Up-front Planning

No initiative should start without a fully articulated program model and a sound operational plan for managing the partnership initiative. All interested parties would be well advised to invest in producing these products through an initial planning phase of perhaps six months. Expert technical assistance should be accessed at this point to assist the partners in producing these products. It is important, however, that the final products are not just a compilation of well-written ideas and activities but reflect the beliefs and commitments of the partners on how they will proceed and work together.

4. Implement the Mission and Strategy as Planned

Long-term success and the ability to learn how a partnership initiative functions depends on the ability to observe what is being done and how it is being implemented. That necessitates a clearly defined mission and strategy that are, at least initially, implemented as planned. This means sticking to the identified target group and the approach designated for serving them. In essence, each partnership initiative might best be viewed as a unique program model that is demonstrating the best way to assist low-income workers.

5. Allocate Adequate Staff to Effectively Implement an Initiative

As repeated throughout this monograph, developing and implementing a CC/CBO partnership is challenging. Such an effort cannot be left to junior staff; senior level staff are needed to guide a partnership initiative. As such, partnership organizations must be willing to assign strong staff to this effort or be willing to secure new staff that have the appropriate capabilities and experience. Partnership initiatives also need at least one senior staff person that is responsible for seeing that all activities are conducted as intended, including activities conducted by the other partnering organizations. This is likely a full-time job.

6. Monitor and Track Progress from the Start

Effective program implementation requires that all interested parties must stay informed on how an initiative is progressing and be prepared to intervene in a constructive way to insure that challenges and problems are addressed as they arise. Simply put, organizations must be open to learning and modifying activities as an initiative develops and matures. This requires some level of management oversight that monitors and tracks program activities as well as determines that the partnership operational plan is being implemented as promised. Such a function can be conducted by staff within the initiative or by an outside party. No matter the approach, the executive leaders of the partnering organizations have the responsibility to assess progress and take the necessary steps when things are not progressing as expected.

7. Let Unsuccessful Partnerships Die

It must be well understood that not every CC/CBO partnership initiative will succeed. All parties involved are best served by allowing an initiative "to fail, to die or simply fade away."[18] To do otherwise will likely result in a great deal of wasted energy and resources. It should be recognized that every failure likely contains important lessons that can inform current and future efforts. It is important to capture these lessons before staff and the structure entirely disappear.

8. Don't Forget to Use Partnership Initiatives to Tackle More Systemic Issues

Partnership initiatives are of interest based on their potential to effectively help low-income workers achieve career advancement outcomes. Because developing and sustaining a partnership initiative can be so intense, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the ultimate goal is to find better ways to assist low-income workers. Attention should be given to how such initiatives can reach scale and how they can be used to foster reform within the education and workforce development system so that it is better able to address the needs of low-income workers.

Conclusion

The inherent risks and disappointments associated with CC/CBO partnership initiatives should not reduce the interest or support in starting a CC/CBO collaborative. The opportunities and benefits from these two institutions working together are very real as is the need to find better ways of helping low-income workers succeed in the labor market. Efforts to support these initiatives must continue and move forward so that more successes can be realized. Bringing more substantive expertise and management rigor to the process of developing and operating CC/CBO partnerships is an important step that can lead to sounder partnership arrangements. It also is a step that can lead to better outcomes for low-income workers.

1. Details on the opportunities and demands of today's economy can be found in many reports. Work by Anthony Carnevale is particularly salient. See: Anthony P. Carnevale and Donna M. Desrochers. *Help Wanted ... Credentials Required: Community Colleges in the Knowledge Economy.* Education Testing Service and American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, D.C. 2001.

2. For more on this subject see: Golanka, Susan, and Lisa Matus-Grossman. *Opening Doors: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Low-Income Workers*. New York and Washington, Manpower Demonstration and Research Corporation and National Governors' Association. 2001.

3. Kazis, Richard. *"Community Colleges and Low Income Populations: A Background Paper"* Jobs for the Future, Boston, Mass., March 2002, pg. 1.

4. Roberts, Brandon. *The Best of Both: Community Colleges and Community-Based Organizations Partner to Better Serve Low-Income Workers and Employers*. Public/Private Ventures, New York, 2002.

5. Roberts. pg. 8.

6. Clymer, Carol, Et.al. *States of Change: Policies and Programs to Promote Low-Wage Workers' Steady Employment and Advancement*. Public/Private Ventures, New York, 2001, pg. 22.

7. Carnevale, pg. 19.

8. McCabe, Robert H. *No One Too Waste: A Report to Public Decision-Makers and Community College Leaders*. American Association of Community Colleges. Washington, D.C. 2000. pg.36.

9. Center for Community College Policy. *State Funding for Community Colleges: A 50-State Survey*. Education Commission of the States. Denver 2000. pg. 20.

10. Austin, James. *The Collaboration Challenge: How Non-profits and Businesses Succeed Through Strategic Alliances*. The Drucker Foundation, New York, 2001. pg. 1.

11. Winer, Michael and Ray, Karen. *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining and Enjoying the Journey*. Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. Saint Paul, Minnesota. 2000. pg. 24.

12. Winer. pgs. 23-24.

13. Center for Development Information and Evaluation. *Designing and Managing Partnerships Between U.S. and Host Country Entities*. U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, D.C. 2001 pg.1.

14. Ibid.

15. La Piana, David. *Real Collaboration: A Guide to Grantmakers.* Ford Foundation, New York. 2001, pg. 6.

16. Winer. pgs. 88-89.

17. La Piana. pg. 5.

18. Ibid. pg. 22.

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